

## **WILDLIFE HABITAT**

Wildlife habitat quality and quantity are declining in Wyoming. The Interim Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee has introduced a bill reviving a bold step towards protecting our wildlife heritage. Please read the bill and the proposed amendments before making a decision. Seldom have I seen a legislative proposal so defined by preconceptions rather than content. I'd like to take a minute to talk about what this plan, with its proposed amendments, is not.

- The Wildlife and Natural Resources Funding Act gives no money to operate the Game and Fish Department.
- It does not allow the state or its agencies to buy land.
- It specifically states that it is not intended to restrict continued development of Wyoming's mineral resource endowment.

In fact, by working on wildlife issues and endangered species in a strategic way, the act should help reduce conflicts with mineral development and agriculture. It also holds the promise of helping to reduce the potential for disease transmission.

Wildlife and wildlife habitat are longstanding issues in Wyoming. Many of us were involved in the issues more than 20 years ago. This is not a new idea but it is an important strategic step in building on Wyoming's assets.

Equally important, but far more difficult to quantify, is the intimate and integral part wildlife, wildlife habitat and open spaces play in defining who we are in Wyoming.

As governor, I have attended nine funerals for Wyoming soldiers who lost their lives fighting for a country and State they loved. At each of these services, the eulogy, family pictures and the sharing of experiences included the soldier's love of Wyoming's outdoors and its wildlife. One of the services included a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation video as part of the tribute to and definition of the fallen loved one and soldier.

Memorial services for Wyoming people, be they soldiers or citizens, link our lives to Wyoming's outdoor resources. If it is important enough to talk about when we have departed this earth – it is important enough to act on while God grants us life.